

# H. Rider Haggard's Newest Best Novel

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lightning-smitten statue, and cursed us, especially Bastin.

"My daughter is gone!" he cried. "Burned up by the fiery power that is my servant. Nothing remains of her but dust; and, Priest, this is your doing. You poisoned her heart with your childish doctrines of mercy and sacrifice and the rest, so that she threw herself into the path of that terrible flash to save some puny, miserable races that she has never known."

He paused exhausted, whereon Bastin rose and answered him with considerable spirit.

"Yes, Oro, she being a holy woman, has gone where you will never follow her. Also it is your own fault, since you should have listened to her entreaties instead of boxing her ears, like the brute you are."

"My daughter is gone," went on Oro, recovering his strength, "and my great designs are ruined. Yet only for a little while," he added, "for the world-balance will return again, if not till after your life-spans are done."

"If you don't take care and doctor yourself, Lord Oro," said Bickley, also rising. "I may tell you as one who understands such things that very likely it will be after your life-span is done also. Although their effect may be delayed, severe shocks from burns and over-excitement are likely to prove fatal to the aged."

Oro snarled at him—no other word describes it.

"And there are other things, Physician," he said, "which I assure you are apt to prove fatal to the young. At least, now you will no longer deny my power."

"I am not sure," answered Bickley, "since it seems from what we have seen that there is a greater Power, namely, that of a woman's love and sacrifice."

"And a greater still," interrupted Bastin, "which put these ideas into her head."

"As for you, Humphrey," went on Oro, "I rejoice to think that you at least have lost two things that men desire above all other things—the woman you sought and the future kingship of the world."

"I stood up and faced him. The first I have gained, although how you do not understand, Oro," I answered. "And of the second, seeing that it would have come through you and on your conditions, I am indeed glad to be rid. I wish no power that springs from murder and no gifts from one who answered his daughter's prayer with blows."

For a moment he seemed remorseful and an expression of regret softened his features.

"She vexed me with her foolishness," he said. Then his wrath blazed up again higher than ever.

Too badly shaken up by our recent experience to expostulate with him, all three of us remained silent. But we drew together, gradually, realizing that we must depend upon each other now that Yva was gone. Even Tommy grew very still and trembled.

At length, when he had controlled his rage enough to speak, Oro went on:

"And it was you, Humphrey, who taught her to revolt. You are guilty, all three of you, and therefore I am left with none to serve me in my old age, and therefore, also, my mighty schemes are overthrown."

"And therefore, Oro, if you speak the truth, half the world is saved," I added quietly, "and one has left it of whom it was unworthy."

"You think that these civilizations of yours, as you are pleased to call them, are saved, do you?" he sneered. "Yet even if Bickley were right and I should die and become powerless, I tell you that they are already doomed."

"I have studied them in your books and seen them with my eyes, and I may say that they are rotten before ever they are ripe, and their end shall be the end of the Sons of Wisdom, to die for lack of increase. That is why I should have saved the East, because in it alone there is increase, and thence alone can arise the last great race of man, which I should have given to your children for an heritage. Moreover, think not that you Westerners have done with wars. I tell you that they are but begun and that the sword shall eat them up, and what the sword spares shall snatch from class in the struggle for supremacy and ease."

Thus spoke Oro, with such extraordinary and concentrated bitterness that I confess he would have frightened me had I been capable of fear, which at that moment I was not. Who is afraid when all is lost?

Nor was Bastin alarmed, if for other reasons.

"I think it right to tell you, Oro," he said, "that the only future you need trouble about is your own. God Almighty will look after the Western Civilizations in whatever way He may think best, as you may remember He did just now. Only I am sure you won't be here to see how it is done."

Again fury blazed in Oro's eyes. "At least I will look after you, you half-bred dogs, who yap out ill-omened prophecies of death into my face. Since the three of you loved my daughter whom you brought to her doom, and were by her beloved, if differently, I think it best that you should follow on her road. How? That is the question. Shall I leave you to starve in these great caves? Nay, look not toward the road of escape which doubtless she also pointed out to you, for as Humphrey knows, I can travel swiftly and I will make sure that you find it blocked. Or shall I?"—and he looked upward at the great globes of wandering fire, as though he purposed to summon them to be our death, as doubtless he could have done.

"I do not care what you do," I answered wearily. "Only I would beg you to strike quickly. Yet, for my friends I am sorry, since it is I who led them on this quest, and for you, too, Tommy," I added, looking at the poor little house, commiseratingly. "You were foolish, Tommy," I went on,



"when you scented out that old tyrant in his coffin, at least for your own sake."

Indeed, the dog was terribly scared. He whined continually and from time to time ran a little way and then returned to us, suggesting that we should go from this horror-haunted spot. Lastly, as though he understood that it was Oro who kept us there, Tommy went to him and, jumping up, licked his hand in a beseeching fashion. The super-man looked at the dog, and as he looked the rage went out of his face and was replaced by something resembling pity.

"I do not wish the beast to die," he muttered to himself in low, reflective tones, as though he thought aloud, "for of them all, it alone liked and did not fear me, but it took it with me, it still would die of grief and in the loneliness of the caves. Moreover, she loved him whom I shall see no more; yes, Yva"—and as he spoke the name his voice broke a little.

"Yet," he went on, "if I suffer them to escape they will tell my story to the world and make of me a laughing stock. Well, if they do, what does it matter? None of those Western fools who believe it; thinking they know all, like Bickley, they would mock and say that they were mad, or liars."

Again Tommy licked his hand, but more confidently, as though instinct told him something of what was passing in Oro's mind. I watched with an idle wonder, marvelling whether it were possible that this merciless being would, after all, spare us for the sake of a dog.

So, strange to say, it came about, for suddenly Oro looked up and said:

"Get you gone, and quickly, before my mood changes. The dog has saved you. For its sake I give you your lives who otherwise should certainly have died. She who has gone pointed out to you, I doubt not, a road that runs to the upper air. I think that it is still open. Indeed," he added, closing his eyes for a moment, "I see that it is still open, if long and difficult. Follow it and you should win through. Then take your boat and sail away as swiftly as you can. Whether you live or whether you die, I care nothing, but at least my hands will be clean of your blood, although yours are stained with Yva's. Begone! And my curse go with you."

Without waiting for further words we went to fetch our lanterns, water bottles and bag of food which we had laid down at a little distance. As we approached them, I looked up and saw Oro standing some way off.

The light from one of the blue globes of fire which passed close above his head shone upon him and made him ghastly. Moreover, it seemed to me as though approaching death had written its name upon his malevolent countenance.

I turned my head away, for about it there was something horrible, something menacing and repellent to man, and of it I wished to see no more. Nor, indeed, did I, for when I glanced, in that direction again he was gone. I suppose that he had retreated into the shadows, where no light played.

**At That Moment a Rush of Living Flame Sprang Out and Struck on Yva's Shield. Like a Glowing Angel Wrapped in Fire She Was Swept Upward and Outward and at a Little Distance Dissolved Like a Ghost and Vanished from Our Sight.**

## CHAPTER XXXIII The Return.

**A**t length we gathered our belongings together, and while the others were relighting the lanterns I walked a few paces forward to that spot where Yva had been dissolved in the devouring flame.

Something caught my eye upon the rocky floor. I picked it up. It was the ring, or, rather, the remains of the ring that I had given her on that night when we bared our souls amidst the ruins by the crater lake.

Yva had never worn it on her hand, but for her own reasons, as she told me, she wore it suspended upon her breast beneath her robe. It was an ancient ring that I had bought in Egypt, and was fashioned of gold in which was set a bezel of very hard basalt or other black stone. On this was engraved the ank, or looped cross, which was the Egyptian symbol of Life, and round it was coiled a snake—the symbol of Eternity.

The gold was melted, but the stone, Copyright, 1918, by the Star Company. Great Britain Rights Reserved.

being so hard and protected by the shield and asbestos cloak, for such I suppose it was, had resisted the fury of the flash. Only, now it was white instead of black, like a burnt onyx. Indeed, perhaps it was an onyx. I kissed it and hid it away, for it seemed to me to convey a greeting, and with it a promise.

Then we started, a very sad and dejected trio. Leaving, with a shudder, the vast place where the blue lights played eternally, we came to the shaft up and down which the travelling stone pursued its endless path and saw it arrive and depart again in awestruck wonder.

"Why do you suppose Oro did not send us that way?" said Bickley, pointing to it.

"I am sure I am very glad it never occurred to him," answered Bastin, "for I am certain that we could not have made the journey again without our guide, Yva."

I looked at him and he ceased. Somehow I could not bear, as yet, to hear her beloved name spoken by other lips.

Then we entered the passage that she had pointed out to us, and began a most

terrible journey which, so far as we could judge, for we had lost any exact count of time, took us about sixty hours. The road, it is true, was smooth and unblocked, but the ascent was terribly steep and slippery, so much so that often we had to pull each other up and lie down to rest upon our faces.

But always ahead of us, a radiant and luminous vision, glided over the face and the form of Lady Yva. Whether in body or clad only in spirit garments, we could not tell. Yet her presence seemed as real to us as it had in the world above. She spoke no word, but, her shining shield on her arm and with the other hand outstretched, she drew us after her into the way that we should go. Without her inspiring presence, we could never have found the courage to go forward.

Had it not been for those large, flat-covered bottles of life-water I am sure we should never have won through. But this marvelous elixir, drunk a little at a time, always reinvigorated us and gave us strength to push on. Also we had some food, and fortunately our spare oil held out, for the darkness in that tunnel was complete.

Poor little Tommy became so exhausted that at length we had to carry him by turns, and he would have died had it not been for the water. Indeed, I thought that he was going to die.

After our last rest and a short sleep, however, he seemed to begin to recover, and gallantly there was something in his manner which suggested to us that he knew himself to be not far from the surface of the earth toward which we had crawled upward for thousands upon thousands of feet, fortunately without encountering any one of heat which was not bearable.

We were right, for when we had staggered forward a little way suddenly, with a little yelp of delight, Tommy ran ahead of us and vanished. Then we heard him barking, but where we could not see, since the tunnel appeared to take a turn and continue, but this time on a downward course, while the sound of the barks came from our right.

We searched with lanterns which now were beginning to die and found a little hole almost filled with fallen pieces of rock. We scooped these away with our hands, making an aperture large enough to creep through. A few yards more and we saw the light, the blessed light of the moon, and there in it stood Tommy barking.

Next we heard the sound of the sea as the waves lapped incessantly upon the shore. We struggled on desperately, and presently pushed our way through bushes and vegetation on to a steep declivity. Down this we rolled and scrambled, to find ourselves at last lying upon a sandy beach, while above us the full moon shone brightly in the heavens.

Here, with a heartfelt prayer of thankfulness, we flung ourselves down and slept.

If it had not been for Tommy and we had gone further along the tunnel, which I have little doubt stretched on beneath the sea, where, I wonder, would we have slept that night?

## CHAPTER XXXIII Homeward Bound.

**W**HEN we awoke the sun was shining high in the heavens. Evidently there had been rain toward the dawn, though as we were lying beneath the shelter of some broad-leaved tree, from it we had suffered no inconvenience. Oh! how beautiful, after our sojourn in those unwholesome caves, were the sun and the sea and the sweet air and the raindrops hanging on the leaves.

We did not wake of ourselves; indeed, if we had been left alone I am sure we should have slept the clock round, for we were terribly tired.

What woke us was the chatter of a crowd of Orofenans who were gathered at a distance from the tree and engaged in staring at us in a frightened way; also the bark of Tommy, who vociferously objected to their intrusion upon our slumbers. Among the people I recognized our old friend the chief, Marama, by his wonderful feather cloak, and, sitting up, I beckoned to him to approach.

After a good deal of hesitation Marama came, walking delicately like Agag and stopping apprehensively from time to time to study us, as though he were of sore that we were real.

"What is it that frightens you, Marama?" I asked him.

"You frighten us, O Friend-from-the-Sea. Whence did you and the Healer and the Bellowers come, and why is the little black beast so large-eyed and thin? Over the lake we know you did not come, for we have watched day and night; moreover, there is no canoe upon the shore. Also, it would not have been possible."

"Why not?" I asked, curiously, anxious to hear his reasons for such a conclusion.

"Come and see," he answered. Rising stiffly, we emerged from beneath the tree and perceived that we were at the foot of the cliff against which the remains of the yacht had been borne by the great tempest. Indeed, there it was within a couple of hundred yards of us.

Following Marama, we climbed the sloping path which ran up the cliff and ascended a knoll whence we could see the lake and the cone of the volcano in its centre. At least, we used to be able to see it, but now, at any rate to the naked eye, we could make out nothing, except a brown spot in the midst of the waters of the lake.

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